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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: "YOUTH BULGE" STRAINS THE FABRIC OF ZAMBIAN SOCIETY

REF: A. LUSAKA 507
[1](#)B. LUSAKA 304

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Zambia's long-term vision for national development -- to become a prosperous middle income nation by 2030 -- is beset by many challenges, including building democratic institutions, creating and sustaining economic growth, fighting corruption, and turning the tide of HIV/AIDS. Adding to and complicating these challenges is Zambia's overwhelmingly youthful demographic - over 55 percent of Zambia's population is under the age of 19. This "youth bulge" strains public services in areas such as education and health and challenges Zambia's traditional hierarchical system that values age and experience over youthful innovation. The flip side of these challenges is the opportunity to shape a new generation of Zambians by giving them the tools to claim a stake in the future of their country. End summary.

Zambia: The New King of Pop(ulation)

[1](#)2. (SBU) Zambia's population in mid-2009 is estimated at 12.8 million, with an average fertility rate of 6.2 children per woman (rural fertility rates are as high as 7.5 children per woman, among the highest in the world). This fertility rate has remained relatively constant over the past 15 years and is high for the region - Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique and Zimbabwe all have lower fertility rates. Because birth rates have been so high for so long, Zambia has a young population. According to an analysis prepared for the Ministry of Finance's Social and Population Unit, over 55 percent of Zambia's population is under the age of 19, with 46 percent under the age of 15. By contrast, approximately 7 percent of the population is aged 65 and above.

[1](#)3. (SBU) This young population has serious consequences for Zambian society in the near and long term. Zambia's child dependency ratio, or the number of child dependents under the age of 15 for every 100 adults of working age, is currently about 93. This places a heavy burden on the working age population, who must provide for their dependents, and it constrains the provision of social services funded out of a relatively small tax base. If fertility rates remain unchanged, population models estimate that Zambia's population could grow to 32.7 million by 2037.

Zambia's Children Are the Future: Teach Them Well...

[1](#)4. (U) A child in Zambia faces an uphill climb in his or her attempt to become a productive member of society. Zambia's education system is already under strain -- there were 2.9 million children in grades 1-7 in 2008, compared to 1.8 million in 2000. The GRZ announced free basic education (grades 1-7) in 2002, which translated into large increases

in primary school enrollment. Net primary school enrollment was officially 103 percent in 2008 (over 100 percent due to probable undercounting in official population statistics), but the quality of education is still an issue. Only one-third of the students in grade 5 attain the minimum level in English and math. A key factor in this low achievement is the high pupil/teacher ration of 71:1 in lower grades. Most classes are split into double or triple shifts, meaning that pupils receive only three hours or less of instruction per school day, leaving teachers overworked and fatigued.

15. (U) The rapid expansion of basic education has also increased the demand for post-primary education, but supply remains limited due to a lack of facilities and qualified teachers. Net secondary school enrollment was only 24.6 percent in 2007. and drop out rates are high, especially for girls. In 2009, about 58,000 pupils took the grade 12 examinations and almost 35,000 students passed. However, the total enrollment for Zambia's three public universities is less than 15,000 students, and the 286 government-certified vocational training institutions and two-year skills training institutions have an enrollment of only about 26,000. This means that many high school graduates are unable to pursue tertiary education, even in a vocational training institution.

And Let Them Lead the Way?

16. (U) Even if they manage to stay in school and graduate with a degree or vocational diploma, young people face an economy with few jobs to offer. An estimated 250,000 young

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people (ages 15-25; 15 is the minimum working age) enter the work force every year. The Central Statistical Office's last announcement regarding the unemployment rate was in 2006, when it said that 16 percent of Zambians aged 15 and older were unable to find work. According to a 2005 Labour Force survey, of the 4.1 million Zambians working, only 416,000 (10 percent) were employed in the formal sector, while 3.2 million (78 percent) were employed in the informal sector (e.g., working as domestic employees or working in an unregistered business). Most observers agree that youth unemployment is much higher than the overall unemployment rate, and underemployment is estimated at over 84 percent of total employed persons.

17. (SBU) Zambian youth who may wish to turn their fight to the political realm will find the going very hard. More vehicles for the promotion of particular persons than political agendas, Zambian political parties rely on the traditional hierarchical social system that values age and experience over youthful innovation. In the 2008 presidential elections, the two top vote-getters, Rupiah Banda and Michael Sata, were both 71 years old -- and it appears that both intend to run again in 2011. Most parties have youth branches, but they are usually on display for elections and conventions and conveniently ignored for much of the rest of the time. Sam Zulu, the opposition Patriotic Front's (PF) youth chairperson, was attacked by PF heavies during a press conference at which he was decrying the party's lack of internal democracy (ref A).

18. (SBU) In the scramble to carry out presidential elections precipitated by the August 2008 death of president Levy Mwanawasa within the constitutionally-mandated three months, the GRZ decided that it did not have time to update voter rolls and instead used lists from the 2006 elections. This meant that any Zambian who had turned 18 since 2006 was disenfranchised. Some experts estimate that up to 1.2 million young people were prevented from voting in a country that has 3.9 million registered voters overall -- only 1.8 million of whom even voted in 2008.

19. (SBU) The 2011 elections now loom on the horizon, and the

GRZ's promises of a new voter registration drive have thus far not panned out (ref B). The GRZ informed donors in March that voter registration would not begin until 2010 because the National Constitutional Conference (NCC) was considering increasing the number of parliamentary constituencies, which in turn would require changes to voting district boundaries. The NCC was scheduled to complete its deliberations in July of 2009, but it now looks like final recommendations and determinations will not be made until later this year. Unless issuance of voter and national identification cards (both required in order to vote) begins soon, up to 2.8 million youth could be disenfranchised in the 2011 elections.

The Role of Assistance: My Future's So Bright...

¶10. (SBU) Zambia's youth bulge represents the greatest threat to Zambia's historic stability. Addressing this youth bulge problem clearly presents formidable challenges to a country that already has plenty on its plate. With a "rising tide lifts all boats" logic, U.S. Mission Zambia's focus on economic growth as its number one assistance and policy priority has a certain relevance to the overwhelmingly young Zambian public. However, more can be done to address the particular stresses to the Zambian system imposed by a largely youthful population. New programs could address tertiary, technical and vocational education needs and assistance to the GRZ in preparing the 2011 elections, particularly with regard to registering, educating and motivating the youth electorate.

BOOTH